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SUBJECT: REACTION TO POPE BENEDICT'S SPEECH

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Jordanians reacted negatively to press accounts of Pope Benedict XVI's September 14 speech in Regensburg. Sensational media coverage of this episode feeds many Jordanian Muslims' perception that Islam is under attack from all quarters. Jordanian Christians also sought to distance themselves from the speech. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Government spokesman Nasser Joudeh on September 18 characterized the Pope's remarks as "offensive," but offered that his quick statement of regret was a "positive step." Joudeh said the Pope's attempt to clarify his statement showed there was no "ill-intention," but added that the GOJ is "awaiting more steps."

¶3. (SBU) The Chamber of Deputies passed a resolution September 17 calling for individuals and organizations to denounce the Pope's comments. The statement read in part, "These comments only serve to fuel sentiments and insult the feelings of hundreds of millions of Muslims worldwide." Separately, 68 Members of Parliament signed a petition calling on the Pope to apologize.

¶4. (SBU) Christian notables were front and center at a sit-in organized by the professional associations on September 18. Christian MP Ra'ed Qaqish organized the MPs' petition. A few Christian contacts have defended the Pope, but only in private conversations with Embosfs.

¶5. (SBU) The Islamic Action Front requested authorization from the Governor of Amman to hold a demonstration in the vicinity of the Papal Nunciature, Friday September 22.

¶6. (SBU) There has been extensive media coverage of the Pope's statements. Commentary has been universally critical, and in some cases suggested that the Vatican is aligning itself with supposedly anti-Islamic statements emanating from elsewhere in the Western world (septel).

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